Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

Settlement Hierarchy Methodology Consultation Paper
October 2025

1. Introduction

1.1   As part of the preparation of the new Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan (2024 – 2045), the Borough Council is undertaking a review of the existing settlement hierarchy, last published in 2021. The settlement hierarchy plays a vital role in shaping the spatial strategy of the Local Plan by identifying how different settlements across the Borough function, and guiding where new development should be located in the most sustainable and appropriate way.

1.2   The current settlement hierarchy, which stems from the strategy in the adopted Local Plan (Core Strategy 2009 through to Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document 2016), needs to be updated to reflect more recent evidence, changes in population, local services & facilities, infrastructure provision, recent development quantities, and local circumstances. It is also essential that the hierarchy aligns with national planning policy and supports the Council's ambition to deliver sustainable growth while protecting the distinct character and sense of community in rural areas. In addition, the Council has had to revert back to Regulation 18 stage due to changes in national policy and the Standard Housing Method, amongst other matters, and therefore this was an appropriate time to revisit the hierarchy, which was last reviewed in 2021.

1.3   The review of the hierarchy will help determine if the proposed distribution of future housing, employment, and infrastructure across the Borough is appropriate. It will consider the role and function of each settlement, the availability of key services and facilities, and how well-connected communities are to the wider transport network.

What are we consulting on?

1.4   To ensure the settlement hierarchy will reflect current local circumstances and priorities, we are consulting on the methodology underpinning the settlement hierarchy as part of the suite of documents available for comment during the Regulation 18 draft Local Plan consultation, which is scheduled to begin in October 2025. In particular, it is important to hear from town & parish councils, local residents/business owners, and other key stakeholders. Feedback from this consultation will help to confirm that we are planning appropriately on a range of planning matters, such as the approach to site allocations and the definition of and context for individual settlements.

1.5   The Council encourages all interested parties to take part in the consultation. All responses will be carefully considered before the Settlement Hierarchy Review Paper is finalised for the Regulation 19 Submission Plan in Spring 2026.

What is a settlement hierarchy?

1.6   There is no specific requirement in national policy to include a settlement hierarchy in a local plan, but it is a commonly accepted approach to do so. In Hinckley and Bosworth, the settlement hierarchy has formed a fundamental part of plan making and decision making, and the aim is to continue this nationally acknowledged approach in the new Local Plan.

1.7   A settlement hierarchy is just one element of a Local Plan that assists in achieving sustainable development. The vision, aims and objectives of the new Local Plan are listed in the Regulation 18 draft Local Plan document.

Scope

1.8   The purpose of this report is to consider the methodology in order to carry out a full updated settlement hierarchy study in preparation for the Regulation 19 Submission Draft Local Plan.

1.9   This paper will consider:

- The overall reasons, context and approach to determining a settlement hierarchy
- The scoring matrix for the quantitative elements of the data collection
- The approach to qualitative analysis of settlements
- The evaluation of the qualitative and quantitative data combined
- Potential appropriate tiers in the hierarchy

1.10   The settlement hierarchy papers, including this methodology paper, will only look at the settlement hierarchy itself; they will not look at any potential future strategy for development, including the amount of development required, or the distribution of that development to individual settlements. This will be determined by other means through the Local Plan process.

1.11   The study will look at the current function of settlements to categorise them into tiers, but will not consider constraints to future development.

1.12   The strategy for development in the current adopted local plan is to direct the majority of new development to settlements in the higher tiers of the settlement hierarchy. Through our work so far for the new Local Plan, evidence has suggested there should be no indication that this should change. However, further evidence base work will be required to look at any potential distribution of development to lower tiers or settlements within the hierarchy.

2.   Setting the context

The study area

2.1   The settlement hierarchy review covers the entirety of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough. The borough is bounded by North West Leicestershire District to the north, Charnwood District to the north-east, Blaby District to the east and south-east, Rugby District to the south, Nuneaton and Bedworth District to the south west, and North Warwickshire District to the west. Hinckley and Bosworth is a borough with both an urban and rural feel; Hinckley, Burbage, Barwell and Earl Shilton forming the urban south, and the rest of the borough forming the sub-urban, rural, and countryside.

2.2   Overall, we have identified 60 settlements to include in the hierarchy, ranging from large urban areas to small groupings of residential properties or employment-based areas. Figure 1 below from the Hinckley and

Bosworth Rural Strategy (2024 – 2028) shows the geographical spread of settlements across the borough (please note that this does not include all settlements in this paper).

Figure 1: Representation of geographical locations of the settlements of Hinckley and Bosworth, HBBC Rural Strategy 2024-2028 (not to scale)

2.3   The proposed settlements (residential or employment-based) to be covered by this paper and the finalised hierarchy review paper are listed in Table 1 below. This list is all inclusive of all settlements within the Core Strategy (2009), those identified within the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD (2016), and those identified afterwards in various documents, such as the Rural Strategy, and from local knowledge.

Settlements inc. in this review		
Atterton	Earl Shilton	Osbaston
Bagworth	Far Coton	Peckleton
Bardon	Fenny Drayton	Pinwall
Barlestone	Field Head	Ratby
Barton in the Beans	Groby	Ratcliffe Culey
Barwell	Higham on the Hill	Shackerstone
Battram (Nailstone)	Hinckley	Sheepy Magna
Bilstone	Kirkby Mallory	Sheepy Parva
Botcheston	Lindley	Shenton
Bradgate Hill	Little Orton	Sibson
Brascote	Market Bosworth	Stanton under Bardon
Bull in the Oak	Markfield	Stapleton
Burbage	Merry Lees	Stoke Golding
Cadeby	Nailstone	Sutton Cheney
Carlton	Newbold Heath	Thornton
Congerstone	Newbold Verdon	Twycross

Settlements inc. in this review		
Copt Oak	Newtown Unthank	Upton
Cross Hands	Norton-Juxta-Twycross	Wellsborough
Dadlington	Odstone	Witherley
Desford	Orton-on the-Hill	Wykin

Policy Context

2.4   The review of the settlement hierarchy is grounded in the principles and requirements set out in national planning policy, particularly the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). These documents provide the overarching framework for promoting sustainable development and guiding the spatial distribution of growth.

Presumption in favour of sustainable development

2.5   The NPPF (2024) sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which applies to not only decision taking, but plan making also. Plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that:

- Meets local development needs.
- Aligns growth with infrastructure.
- Improves the environment.
- Mitigates and adapts to climate change.

2.6   Although the NPPF does not specifically prescribe a settlement hierarchy approach, it supports the principle of guiding development to the most sustainable locations.

2.7   The settlement hierarchy plays a key role in delivering these objectives by identifying which settlements are best placed to accommodate growth based on their existing infrastructure, services, and accessibility.

Strategic Planning and Local Decision-Making

2.8   The NPPF (2024) emphasizes effective strategic planning across local authority boundaries, particularly in addressing housing needs, infrastructure delivery, and climate resilience. It also reaffirms the role of locally-prepared plans in guiding development, with the settlement hierarchy forming a key part of spatial strategy.

2.9   It's also important to note the wider catchment of settlements' services, for example hospitals, schools, leisure provision and public transport, all of which are not defined by boundaries and can serve a wider population strategic in nature.

2.10   The settlement hierarchy also plays a role in decision-making post adoption of the local plan. In decision-making, the settlement hierarchy provides a clear basis for assessing planning applications, that remains relevant long-term. It helps determine whether a proposed development is appropriate for its location

by considering the role of the settlement within the wider spatial strategy. For example, larger towns or service centres identified at the top of the hierarchy are typically expected to accommodate a greater share of housing, employment, and infrastructure growth due to their existing services and transport links. On the other hand, applications within smaller villages or hamlets may see development limited to meeting local needs or enhancing rural sustainability.

2.11   The hierarchy also supports consistency and transparency in planning decisions. By setting out which settlements are suitable for different types and scales of development, it helps planners, developers, and communities understand the rationale behind approvals or refusals. This is particularly important in managing speculative development pressures and ensuring that growth is plan-led rather than speculative. It also aids in resisting inappropriate development in unsustainable locations, thereby safeguarding environmental assets and maintaining the character of rural areas.

Supporting Rural Communities

2.12   The NPPF (2024) continues to support thriving rural communities, encouraging sustainable growth in rural areas where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of settlements. This includes ensuring access to services and reducing reliance on the car, which are central considerations in settlement hierarchy assessments.

National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

2.13   The NPPG reinforces the need for a clear and evidence-based approach to settlement classification. It advises that:

- Local Plans should be informed by an understanding of the role and function of settlements.
- Authorities should consider the availability of services, employment opportunities, and transport links when determining the sustainability of settlements.
- The hierarchy should be used to guide the distribution of development in a way that supports local communities and aligns with strategic objectives.

2.14   Together, these national policy documents provide a robust framework for assessing the relative sustainability of settlements and ensuring that the Local Plan supports balanced and inclusive growth.

The adopted Local Plan and existing hierarchy

2.15   The current adopted Local Plan consists of four main documents: the Core Strategy (2009), the Hinckley Town Centre Area Action Plan (2011), the Earl Shilton and Barwell Area Action Plan (2014), and the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (2016). The settlement hierarchy was established in Chapter 4 of the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy defines the settlement hierarchy as:

- Urban Area (comprising the main settlements of Hinckley, Burbage, Barwell and Earl Shilton);

- Key Rural Centres (split into three categories of 'relating to Leicester'; 'standalone' and 'within the National Forest');
- Rural Villages; and
- Rural Hamlets.

2.16   The adopted Core Strategy (2009) Settlement Hierarchy is set out in Table 2 below:

Tier	Settlements
Urban	- Hinckley - Burbage - Barwell - Earl Shilton
Key Rural Centres Relating to Leicester	- Desford - Groby - Ratby - Markfield
Key Rural Centres within the National Forest	- Bagworth - Thornton
Key Rural Centres Stand Alone	- Barlestone - Market Bosworth - Newbold Verdon - Stoke Golding
Rural Villages	- Higham-on-the-Hill - Stanton under Bardon - Sheepy Magna - Nailstone - Twycross - Witherley - Congerstone
Rural Hamlets	- Barton in the Beans - Botcheston - Bradgate Hill - Cadeby - Carlton - Dadlington - Fenny Drayton - Kirkby Mallory - Norton Juxta Twycross - Orton on the Hill - Peckleton - Ratcliffe Culey - Shackerstone - Sibson - Stapleton - Sutton Cheney

2.17   Further to the identified hierarchy, a number of other Hamlets existed in the borough but were not identified in the Core Strategy at that time as they did not have a defined settlement boundary.

New Local Plan (2024 – 2045)

2.18   The Council embarked on a new Local Plan in 2017. The Council have consulted several times between 2017 and the present day; the most up to date Local Development Scheme (LDS) confirms that the Council intend to submit the plan to the Secretary of State in 2026.

2.19   The Settlement Hierarchy Review Paper 2021 set out the proposed settlement hierarchy for the new Local Plan in Section 6. In summary the key changes proposed in that review were:

- Bagworth and Thornton were reclassified from Key Rural Centre to Rural Village
- Nailstone reclassified from Rural Village to Rural Hamlet
- Several additional smaller settlements were assessed and classified as Rural Hamlets

2.20   Although the 2021 paper did undertake a full review of the hierarchy, and whether the methodology and proposed tiers were still applicable and appropriate, the context for the new Local Plan has changed somewhat due to a variety of factors, such as a revised NPPF being issued in December 2024, and as a result increased housing targets via the re-introduced Standard Method. The Local Planning Authority have had to revert to the Regulation 18 stage to ensure that our proposed strategy and policies reflect this updated national position, and the new increased housing requirement targets.

2.21   As such, it was deemed appropriate that the methodology underpinning the settlement hierarchy was reviewed again, before proceeding further to a Regulation 19 (scheduled for Spring 2026), to ensure it was suitable and applicable, demonstrating our proposed strategy is sustainable, and to ensure we can support our communities and sustain/improve their infrastructure/facilities/services over the plan period.

2.22   Following the Regulation 18 consultation in Autumn 2025, the team will review the consultation responses on this methodology review, and if there have been any circumstantial changes within settlements and issue a finalised Settlement Hierarchy Paper for consideration at the Regulation 19 consultation.

3.   Methodology

3.1   There is no available guidance at the national level with regards to establishing a settlement hierarchy. A variety of approaches have informed settlement hierarchies in different local plans nationally that were found to be sound at examination. The reviewed approaches all look at common themes such as the availability of services, facilities and public transport. Other factors considered in some of the studies include looking at retail provision, population size, Office for National Statistics (ONS) classifications for areas, and distance from other settlements. It can also be seen that some studies take a more comprehensive approach than others, dependent on the local circumstances.

3.2   Hinckley and Bosworth's settlements vary greatly in their size, character, function and form. The setting of a settlement hierarchy plays a vital part of the Local Plan strategy and helps inform other matters (such as the spatial pattern of development, the approach to site allocations, and whether or not settlement boundaries are required). As a result, it may be appropriate to follow a relatively comprehensive assessment process to make sure that all the relevant factors are considered for all the different types of settlements. In particular, the Council is proposing that we introduce/split certain tiers of the hierarchy (see Section 5, therefore to support this approach, all matters need to be taken into consideration.

3.3   Below is an overview of the methodology used to gather data for assessing and tiering settlements within the hierarchy.

Step One: Audit

3.4   **A quantitative** audit of each settlement will take place to take stock of current facilities and services. The review will look at various evidence base documents available to us and use local-knowledge and mapping services to gather information on:

- Key **daily** services - for example schools, a shop/convenience store, bus/train services, broadband, and employment
- Important **occasional** services - for example a GP, dentist, post office, library, leisure facilities
- **Transport accessibility** - frequency and connectivity

3.5   Site visits may be required to corroborate information or to complete missing information. The team may also be in touch with Parish Councils and/or Neighbourhood Plan groups where local knowledge is required.

Quantitative

Scoring and Weighting

3.6   Once the audit of settlements is complete, the team will assign scores to services based on frequency of use and importance. There will be higher weighting to facilities that serve a wider catchment (i.e. outside of that particular settlement; maybe of wider borough or out-of-borough significance), and essential daily services. The scoring of facilities/services are proposed as below in Table 3, and this has been amended to add or clarify, and therefore is subject to consultation as part of this paper.

Facility	Criteria	Score
Particular Services Tier (serving a wider catchment)		
Secondary School	State funded secondary schools are often located in larger settlements and serve a wider catchment than just the settlement where it is located. Significant numbers of secondary school pupils travel by public transport or school buses. In addition to education, schools also provide a valuable focus for community activities, such as leisure/play based activities, pre and after-school childcare and exercise/wellness classes.	15
Leisure Provision	These facilities (such as leisure centres or sports complexes) are an important leisure and play resource contributing to the health	15

Facility	Criteria	Score
	and well-being of communities. For the leisure provision to score a 15, the offer must encompass publicly accessible sports halls, swimming pools and gyms, and/or access to health facilities and playspace for children.	
Railway Station	Passenger railway services, not leisure/heritage or freight. Stations providing services 5 days a week or more.	15
Community Hospital and/or Accident & Emergency Hospital	Hospitals (being much larger and less common than GP practices) provide specialist services or accident & emergency, serve a wider population and are critical for health infrastructure.	15
Employment Opportunities	Access to large employment sites/areas give settlements economic self-service, with increased opportunities to access a range of employment closer to home, with less reliance on the car. Usually strategic level employment sites provide opportunities at different skill/career levels and in different sectors, and serves a wider catchment. This will be assessed on a sliding scale, from a score of 15 for areas with the closest employment areas/sites, down to a score of 5 for local level employment availability. Scores given in this category (alongside officer judgement) will be fully justified in the scoring matrix and qualitative assessment.	5 - 15
Special Educational Needs (SEN) Schools	SEN schools tend to serve a wider catchment than the settlement they are located within due to their specialist nature and limited numbers of them across the area.	15
Primary Tier		
Primary School	State funded primary schools will generally cater for a local demand and provide an accessible and important day-today facility. Schools can extend their regular service such as before and after school clubs, pre-school nurseries, and the facility can be used for other community uses or act as a local community hub.	10
GP Surgery	Doctors' surgeries provide an essential healthcare service which should be accessible within a small catchment and meet a local	10

Facility	Criteria	Score
	demand. Category includes both permanent surgeries and part-time surgeries.	
Supermarket / Convenience Store	A supermarket or grocery store is a regular necessity. Village shops in rural communities are important, providing goods locally and readily available, and are likely to be used on a day-to-day basis, particularly for those who do not have regular access to a car.	10
Post Office	Post offices are a key community facility offering a range of services and facilities, particularly in rural areas. More permanent post offices, open more than 3 days a week, will score higher.	10
Pharmacy / Chemist	The provision of a chemist/pharmacy plays an integral role in maintaining the health of the community and can provide valuable health care advice and services in the absence of a doctor's surgery. Larger pharmacies, with health related retail, and with a pharmacist on site are higher in the scoring due to having a retail offer as well as being able to treat common ailments and illness, and prescribe urgent repeat medicine under the Pharmacy First scheme.	10
Frequent Bus Service	A good service covering multiple destinations that is hourly and more than 6 days a week.	10
Secondary Tier		
Daily Bus Service	A service covering some destinations, daily and 6 days a week.	5
Pre-school / Nursery	Local childcare can be particularly important for working families. The assessment includes private childcare facilities, nurseries and pre-schools. It is generally assumed most primary schools will include some provision of this category so only facilities separate to schools have been included.	5
Other Educational Facilities	This includes fee paying/independent schools. Fee paying schools tend to serve a wider catchment than the settlement they are	5

Facility	Criteria	Score
	located within and may play a more limited role in meeting the needs of residents of that settlement perhaps through the provision of some community/leisure activities. This more limited role reflects their secondary facility status compared to the primary status of state funded primary/secondary schools.	
Library	Libraries form an important service and help to support education and provide access to IT services. Libraries can offer space for adult learning, children's reading groups, room hire and exhibition and display space.	5
Public House	Public houses can provide a community focus as they stand or can diversify their function to a number of other services such as a community room, indoor games/sports groups (darts, snooker, dominoes etc), a small shop or library, or youth centre.	5
Mobile / part-time Post Office	A key facility but only offering a time-limited service. Less permanent post offices, open less than 3 days a week (particularly with limited opening times such as not covering weekends/evening), will score lower.	5
Takeaway / Restaurant / Cafe	Provide residents with a choice of food outlets as well as providing employment opportunities. In some cases a Café/Restaurant is deemed to offer separate service despite being within the same unit as a shop/pub, therefore has been added to the assessment.	5
Place of worship	In addition to its primary purpose which plays an important role in some people, they also provide facilities for social and recreational activity.	5
Dentist	As with the provision of a pharmacy/opticians, a dentist is a service beneficial to the overall healthcare provision that a settlement can offer. However a demand for a dentist is usually less frequent than that for a GP.	5
Opticians	As with the provision of a pharmacy/dentist, an opticians is a service beneficial to the overall healthcare provision that a	5

Facility	Criteria	Score
	settlement can offer. However a demand for an opticians is less frequent than that for a GP.	
Indoor / Outdoor Sports and Play Facilities	These facilities are an important leisure and play resource contributing to the health and well being of communities. The relevant typologies have been selected from the Council's Open Space study and include: • Play Provision for Children and Teenagers • Outdoor Sports Facilities • Indoor Sport and Recreation • Sports Halls/Swimming Pools	5
Other retail / services	These are all relatively important services that would be used regularly by the community but are not considered to be an essential day to day facility. This category includes a variety of shops and retail which can reduce the need to travel outside of the village. They differ from other shops by providing comparison goods and some services like hairdressers/barbers, salons, bakery's, green-grocers etc.	5
Community Centre / Village Hall / Church Hall	Community or village halls are a key facility that enables a range of social, recreational and cultural activities. The facility provides a space for clubs, groups and community social events.	5
Bank or building society, or mobile / pop-up banking services	Due to the increased usage and accessibility of online-banking and banking apps, banks are closing more frequently across the UK. Due to the availability of banking online, banks/building societies have been re-introduced in this tier. In addition, some banks/building societies have introduced pop-up locations available for face-to-face banking for limited days of the week (these will be researched and included where they exist)	5

Access to Employment

3.7   The access to employment opportunities will be assessed in a slightly different manner; both quantitative and qualitative assessment, including officer judgement, will be used to determine the scoring, as outlined below in Table 3 continued:

Facility	Criteria	Score
Employment Opportunities	Access to large employment sites/areas give settlements economic self-service, with increased opportunities to access a range of employment closer to home, with less reliance on the car. Usually strategic level employment sites provide opportunities at different skill/career levels and in different sectors, and serves a wider catchment. This will be assessed on a sliding scale, from a score of 15 for areas with the closest employment areas/sites of a large scale providing a host of opportunities for differing skill levels, down to a score of 5 for local level employment availability. Scores given in this category (using mapping software, other evidence sources and officer judgement) will be fully justified in the scoring matrix and qualitative assessment.	5 - 15

Qualitative

3.8   A quantitative summary of each settlement will give a further insight into a number of circumstances, gathered through a variety of sources, including officer/local knowledge, online research

3.9   The review will also take into account circumstances that aren't included in the scoring above that play into the wider narrative of how a settlement functions..

3.10   Some services provide a wider benefit and catchment, for example some children from outside of the borough access schools within our borough, and likewise children from other settlements will travel to attend schools in other towns/villages. These circumstances, not just related to education but a number of services, play into the wider narrative of a settlements sustainability, and therefore it is important to cover this in the qualitative audit.

3.11   Additional services and facilities that are considered in the broader qualitative discussion (but not scored) are listed below, along with the reasons for their exclusion from scoring:

- Emergency Services – plays a part in the wider strategic nature of a settlement, but in any case everyone can access emergency services through 999 calls, therefore proximity to police/fire/ambulance stations can skew scoring, i.e. if a station is not located in your settlement, a

score of 0 for this would apply to a settlement either 1 mile away, or 10 miles away, for example. Therefore emergency services will be considered as part of the qualitative assessment

- Higher education – Children are required to be in education, until 18 years old, and therefore higher education is an individuals choice. Therefore it is not appropriate to include this as essential or valuable to have in the immediate vicinity of a settlement
- Access to fast broadband – An ever-increasing vital part of everyday life, with the increase in reliance on the internet, access to fibre or fast-broadband will be assessed
- Availability of cash points – as discussed earlier in the scoring matrix, the availability of banks is decreasing, however people are still reliant on cash, of which can provided via cash points which do not require manned desks
- Population size, demographics and diversity play a huge role in how a settlement functions
- Road networks – a crucial factor in assessing a settlement's sustainability, the availability, quality and proximity of the highway network directly influences environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainable development

Data sources

3.8   A variety of data sources will be used to gather the information required to attribute a score in the matrix above and to write a qualitative summary of the settlements. A summary of our data sources can be found below, **but this is not an exhaustive list**.

1. **Parish Council and Neighbourhood Plan input**
   - Local knowledge of services and facilities
   - Often used to validate or supplement desk-based research
2. **Local Authority Websites**
   - Education (primary, secondary, nursery)
   - Community facilities (halls, libraries, leisure centres)
   - Various supporting planning documents
   - GIS mapping
3. **National Databases**
   - **NHS Service Search** – GP practices, pharmacies, dentists
   - **Network Rail** – Train station locations and service frequency
   - **Post Office Branch Finder** – Operational status and hours.
4. **Online Mapping Tools**
   - Google Maps, OpenStreetMap – Location and proximity of services
   - Used to verify presence and accessibility of facilities
   - DFT's Connectivity Tool

- o   This is a relatively new piece of mapping software that gives information on how sustainably located a place is and the potential transport interventions needed to support it

5. **Transport Data**
   - Local bus timetables and travel guides, or community transport schemes
   - Frequency, proximity and connectivity of bus and rail services

6. **Employment Data**
   - Local and strategic level employment areas, gathered from local knowledge and the latest available Employment Land and Premises Study / Employment monitoring data
   - Number of registered businesses by parish

7. **Infrastructure Data**
   - All matters related to infrastructure and utilities, including, but not limited to:
     - o   Broadband availability (e.g., Superfast Broadband maps)
     - o   Mains gas and drainage coverage
     - o   Renewable energy facilities
   - Data gathered from the latest available Infrastructure Capacity Study

4.   Next Steps

4.1   Below sets out the next steps for producing a finalised Settlement Hierarchy Paper, which will be prepared to support the Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan in 2026.

Audit

- The audit of settlements will be undertaken as per the above matrix, to give an overview of both qualitative and quantitative elements in each of the towns, villages and hamlets.

Analysis and Classification

- The evaluation of the qualitative and quantitative data combined to justify the inclusion of individual settlements within each tier of the proposed hierarchy
- Aggregate scores and explanatory text & officer judgements to determine settlement sustainability
- Group settlements into tiers. The scores will determine the tiers; it may be that tiers remain as per adopted in the current Local Plan, i.e. Urban, Key Rural Centres, Rural Villages and Hamlets. On the other hand, the scoring may lend itself to a more appropriate stretched tiering system, such as (but not limited to):
  - Towns and Urban Centres;
  - Key Service Centres;
  - Key Rural Centres;
  - Rural Villages (Large and Small);
  - Rural Hamlets;

- And Other Countryside Settlements.

Review and Consultation

- Compare with the current adopted Local Plan method, and previous assessments (i.e. the 2021 paper)
- Incorporate feedback from parish/town councils and public consultation (through the Regulation 18 consultation in Autum 2025)
- Adjust for changes in service provision, infrastructure opportunities and changes in any circumstances, both planning-related or on-the-ground.

Outputs in the finalised Settlement Hierarchy Paper

- A revised settlement hierarchy with clear tier definitions
- A scoring matrix showing settlement classifications
- Appendices with individual settlement profiles and audit data

4.2   Overall, the finalised Settlement Hierarchy Paper will help to inform the following:

- The final list of proposed site allocations and the overarching development strategy
- Infrastructure planning and service delivery
- Settlement boundaries, infill opportunities and rural exception sites (for example)
- Monitoring and future reviews

5.   Potential update to the tiers of the hierarchy

5.1   As briefly mentioned above in Section 4, the council is considering some changes to the hierarchy structure.

5.2   Given the very large number of smaller settlements in the borough, particularly the smaller rural areas, we are proposing that it could be appropriate to expand the lower levels of the hierarchy. In effect, this would expand the Rural Villages into Rural Villages Large and Rural Villages Small. Splitting this tier will allow us to define more easily the differences in sizes and functionality of the smaller rural settlements in our borough.

5.3   In addition, early evidence & data gathering, officer judgement and local knowledge is showing that it may be appropriate to add an additional tier above Key Rural Centres, but below Urban/Town Centres. This is to capture settlements with high scores in the availability of services, but not quite the full function, size or diverse demographic of a town centre. This will allow the development strategy to support those larger settlements in planning improved infrastructure to support its large population size and existing services, particularly in relation to highways, health services and education.

5.4   In addition, we have also been deliberating another additional tier below Rural Hamlets called 'Other Countryside Settlements'. This is to capture smaller settlements or groupings of dwellings that previously have not featured in the Local Plan, but are featured in other council strategies, such as the Rural Strategy (2024 – 2028), or have been flagged to us via mapping software or local knowledge, for example groupings of residential farms or small rows of properties.

5.5   Changes to the hierarchy structure, i.e. the splitting or introducing of new tiers, is of great interest for this consultation, and therefore the Council welcomes comments and suggestions on this matter.

6.   Conclusion

6.1   This methodology provides a robust, transparent, and policy-compliant framework for assessing settlement sustainability. It ensures that the Local Plan promotes development in the most appropriate locations, supporting vibrant, accessible, and resilient communities, and will support both decision-making and plan-making in the future. This paper will be part of the Regulation 18 consultation in Autumn 2025, therefore any comments/suggestions are welcome, and will go forward during the writing of the final Settlement Hierarchy Paper to support the submission of the new Local Plan.